

# **Toi Ora Writing**

## **NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT PHILOSOPHY**

No one knows about philosophy  
Learning things to get bizzy  
Doesn't pay to think too much  
Except when the spirit calls  
To know about the past philosophers  
To form your own philosophical ideas  
Stand on the shoulders of giants  
To gain more knowledge  
All the knowledge in the world won't prevent  
your own death  
Be happy in all that you do  
Knowing is different to living

### ***Collaborative class poem***

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**Toi Ora Live Art Trust  
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Toi Ora Live Art Trust is a community art  
centre providing studio space and tuition in  
the arts for people who have experience of  
mental illness.

## **I WISH MY NAME WAS PEACH BLOSSOM WILD CELEBRATION**

I wish my name was Peach Blossom Wild Celebration  
Extravagance would be my vocation, very un-Presbyterian  
Blossoms in red, white and pink  
Open your arms to the bees  
Tiny rose seeds survive beneath snow all winter  
The equinox heralds the burgeoning peach blossoms  
Catholic girls skip to an extravagant wild celebration  
The cycle of seasons is in this way commemorated  
The darkness after 7pm has black hard darkness  
Bright hard cheap light across the wall, over the stairwells  
A time to reflect, turn inwards and nurture  
The tendrils of spring memories  
Spring is a hillside of trees covered in peach blossom  
She danced in wild celebration of life  
A time of new beginnings, baby birds, peach blossom  
Reflection on winter as we leave her behind  
Passing by the town, I was put in a trance  
An intoxicating trance induced by the blossom's tempting allure  
Wicked women having a wild celebration with whiskey and wine.

### ***Collaborative class poem***

## **Introduction**

Most of the writing in this collection was done last year at the old space, across the street, at 19 Putiki Street. Class members wrote poems, short stories, memoir, essays and scenes. We worked on dialogue, pace, plot, character, point of view. We walked Arch Hill to find poems. Several writers attended Poetry Live and took to the stage to share their work.

David Lyndon Brown, Tim Heath, Emma Phillipps, Miriam Barr, Lee Posna and Maxine Fleming have been guest tutors. Emma gave us copies of her chapbooks, and Miriam publishes *Sidestream*. It's good to have something to share in return, with friends, family and the community.

Judith White tutored Toi Ora's creative writing class for five years. When I stepped into the role in February, 2008, the class informed me of the structure they found useful: begin with free writing and write anything you want to write, to warm up, to arrive. Then read a poem or piece of fiction as a leaping off point for a writing exercise. Write. Read your work aloud around the table. If there is time, repeat. We continue to follow this format with satisfying results.

I was fortunate to join a class that arrives hungry to write and is genuinely interested to hear what their fellow writers have written.

We hope you will be interested, as well.

Nancy Eisenberg  
August 2009

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## THE MORNING AFTER

The room was dark and dingy. There was a strong cigarette smell. Cigarette butts spilled over from glass ash trays onto the top of a brown Formica coffee table. Two bodies lay sprawled out on tattered couches.

It was the morning after the night before. John woke up from a comatose sleep.

“Ahhh my head,” he groaned, “Do you have any aspirin?” His mate, Bruce, was still passed out on the couch. John slowly staggered to his feet. Grabbing Bruce by the shoulders, he shook him and said, “Wake up, wake up... Fuck, my head hurts, and I have a throat as dry as an Arab’s jock strap.”

Getting no response from Bruce, John staggered over to the kitchen where he found a dirty glass amongst a heap of dirty dishes on the bench. He turned on the tap and filled his glass with cold water. He turned off the tap, then noisily gulped down several mouthfuls. Burping suddenly, he started coughing and spluttering, causing him to stop drinking.

*Ann James*

## MANIA

my blood flows  
bubbling like electricity  
and as I walk  
my feet don't touch the floor  
a restless energy  
bubbles up inside  
and ideas flow  
with the brilliance  
that is not the everyday  
fireworks erupt  
in my body  
I cannot bear  
to sit still  
laughter catalyses  
hilarity from the mundane  
lights twinkle  
the stars shine brighter  
and I feel invincible  
I can fly  
no more do I need  
the quietness of sleep  
I am manic. I am Alive!

### *Tricia Hall*

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## LOOK AT YOU

She doesn't want to talk anymore,  
ignoring the painful bore  
cannot look at you  
in the late afternoon,  
shadows setting in  
the light of a tea lamp  
hung from the ceiling;  
the tired blatant white walls  
her red dress,  
half asleep before the fire  
lit in the fireplace,  
this gentle old coloured print  
of a painting by Degas.  
She wants to be alone,  
this meeting of not being wanted,  
looking down at the floor over  
the back of a chair  
looking from light into darkness,  
eyes half closed, sad and ill,  
on her face the light  
plays on her cheeks, forehead, nose,  
hair tied at the back of her head,  
that somehow sickness is setting in.

*Andrew Blythe*

argument over the price ensues  
products cannot be located  
or someone realises that they have  
left their wallet behind and  
the checkout girl has to  
put everything back on the shelves  
before the end of her shift

*Tricia Hall*

## A STORMY BABY

he has thunderclouds  
in his scowl  
and his hot tears  
flow like a monsoon  
when he smiles  
sunlight twinkles  
in his eyes  
his mood changes  
like the weather  
is unpredictable  
and unstable  
but brings a sense  
of completeness  
to a day

*Tricia Hall*

## SUPERMARKET

friday night the checkout chicks  
with tills filled with coins for change  
starting work after school, made  
the mad dash to get the bus  
switching uniforms hurriedly in the ladies  
making sure the name badge was pinned  
on in the right place above the pocket  
where it proclaimed “ask me I like to help”  
the after school crowd of mothers and kids  
both tired and out of sorts  
“Mummy I wanna lollypop” and  
“I can’t take you kids anywhere”  
or “I need to go wee wee”  
the lines for the checkouts  
stretching halfway down the aisles  
“cleanup in aisle four” someone  
has dropped a box of eggs  
the little old lady with her walker  
holds up the impatient customers  
as she counts out five dollars and  
fifty cents with ten cent pieces  
and carefully cut out coupons  
there is the customer who watches  
like a beady eyed seagull to pounce  
when the checkout girl makes a mistake  
those are not gala apples dummy  
those are the ones on special  
saving two cents a kilogram all counts you see  
the bar code on something is sure  
not to scan, bell rang for supervisor

## DOWNTOWN DOCKS, PRINCESS WHARF

The summer sun  
a cold wind  
dull bitumen footpaths  
silver roads  
route through  
old Grey Lynn  
of locked houses  
motorway bridge  
looking down on  
snaking causeways  
cars, K. Rd., many people  
Central Town  
head down  
Princess Wharf  
cold blustery wind  
the strange beautiful  
harbour waters  
complex with rips  
currents  
blue green  
white horses  
the Derelict Dredge  
Devonport Ferry  
coming in  
a huge moored  
ocean liner  
packing crates  
a fishing boat  
“Davinci” rolls in  
a walk alone

along Queen Street  
crowds of Sunday shoppers  
Albert Park, without its  
fountain sculpture  
tired, smoky  
a Coke at the  
university  
back home along  
the main way  
12a Psych Flats  
10 minutes to Kingsland  
for a cup of tea  
to lie down in the quiet.

*Andrew Blythe*

## THE END OF THAT ERA

I was so drunk that evening,  
rustic dream urging to leave my mind,  
a party in Brighton Road squats,  
a residence of those I was making ready  
to leave.  
Pungent darkness of the early night  
after games of people,  
a serious note, acting out.  
She and I were outside on the footpath  
in front of an oak tree,  
I could see the face of an old man  
staring back at me from the bark of its trunk,  
while under the influence,  
she had bought an old red car  
that I just about pranged  
not knowing how to drive,  
she had long curly hair  
and she wore sheep skin boots,  
that hot summer night  
the main room full of smoke  
loud talking  
faint light flickering  
at the end of that era.

*Andrew Blythe*

## MY BEST MISTAKE

A wrong turn taken  
A road not often walked  
A picture perfect view  
Of a hidden world  
A pocket of wilderness  
Within a busy city  
A waterfall flowing  
Meandering stream  
Birdsong, crickets chirp  
Wild flowers blossom  
It is spring  
I am lost in Auckland

*Tricia Hall*

## OLD HOUSE

It was an old house. The woman who lived there had been rattling around the old show for some fifty years. She had brought up her seven children in that house. Her husband had died young so it had been a hard road for her. Now dust gathered on her possessions as she was too frail to do much house work.

There was a step ladder out in the garage. It was there for her sons to use if anything needed to be done in the house. Also in the garage there was a stack of boxes, magazines, gardening tools, and old rubbish that had built up over the years. It had been the old lady's habit to put anything in the garage that she didn't quite know what to do with.

Inside the house things were much more in order, except the book shelves in the lounge which were always in a bit of disarray. There were art books, books about politics, coffee table books about New Zealand, novels, encyclopaedias, Atlases. In fact the list goes on. They had been collected over the many years that she educated her children. There was a special section of books about religion, mainly about the Catholic faith, of which she was a member. There were books about faith in crisis, faith and communities, the Dali Lama's view of the Catholic religion, the Oxford Dictionary of Saints, and complete books on specific saints.

The table in the drawing room was always cluttered with paper. It was mainly used as a desk from which she organised all her affairs and wrote to her children. She cut out newspaper clippings to send to her daughters. This meant there were often newspapers hanging around with bits cut out of them.

*Shannon McKewen*

## MY JOB IS TO BE THE LOOKOUT

When he had pledged to go to Montana, his heart was full of ambitions. Every breath he drew inspired him. At last, he told himself, he was going to one of the world's great wildernesses, a mountainous land full of forests and rivers.

Alighting from the Greyhound bus at a tiny town called St. Regis in the midst of pines and mist, he breathed the cloudy air and smiled. His chest was butterflies and his apprehension was as great as his appreciation.

A man from behind him called, "Hey, where you headed?" and showed him into a general store. A hurricane lamp burned above a window and a sturdy stove element glowed. A till sat on a large desk. Geographic maps covered the walls.

"There ain't any work here," the American said, "Anyway, it's all taken up by the companies. They don't take any casuals."

"I'm not as far north-west as I can get," said the newcomer, "I heard that there's a race in Alaska to start soon. That's my type of thing. I've already climbed Everest successfully, and I'm looking for something new. A new challenge."

The storekeeper bit his lip. "Race..." he said, "Everest." He stared at the kid, then gave up his condescension. He started again, "You ever heard of the Iditarod?"

The young man nodded his head.

"That's that race," said the American. "If you can finish that, you've done better than Everest. Seen any lepers?"

The young man startled, surprised. "Lepers?"

"Yeah, those mountains in Nepal, heaps of sickness there, we've all heard. They're paupers. Superstitious, also."

"No," he replied, "But pots of heaps of hashish."

"Well, you can keep that in a dirty sack and throw it

away.”

The local stared at the newcomer again. “Just a minute.” He picked up an enamel telephone and dialled, saying over his shoulder, “Calling Fairbanks.”

The kid held his breath and glanced around the room. He heard the click on the line. The local started talking again.

“Yeah, Mike. Calling from area code four-zero-six. How are ya? Same here. We got a kid here, says he’s climbed Nepal. Yeah...Who knows....Yeah, you taking any entries for the race?...No, he’s a newcomer...OK. See ya next time.” He hung up the receiver and looked at the young man.

“Well, if you’ve got three hundred dollars in your wallet, and wouldn’t mind a train journey, you could be in Fairbanks in two days’ time. Hire all your gear there. It’s tough, mind you. Killed several people already.”

The young man shrugged, “If I can, then I can, and I’ll give it a go. Thanks. Do I get in touch with Mike? Where’s the train station?”

The American had taken on a sarcastic posture.

“Pay me a twenty and I’ll drive you there.”

They got into a battered blue pick-up. The kid noticed that the Yankee didn’t lock the store. The post was such a tiny place, he could conceive that he had been the first stranger there in three years. And the mist, so permanent, occluded the scene so the pines were hardly visible.

The driver breathed, “If you finish, you’ll have done well,” and started the engine.

***D. J. Grierson***

## **A STREET**

A street

A bookstore

Empty ladder on its shelves

Café, ashtrays, magazine with pages missing

Once the repose of pretty girls

Works from Aquinas, a Kempis

Oxford Dictionary of Saints, a latte cup

Only the wind speaks

The street has stories

***Scott MacNevin***

## **I.E., GENUINELY**

I got up this morning and thought  
it was Sunday I had to ring an  
old life time friend of my mothers  
who informed me that it is Monday  
So I nearly did not come to my Toi Ora class  
i.e. genuinely thought it was Sunday  
I caught a taxi to Toi Ora.

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I got up this morning and thought.

***Lisa Barben***

## **THE TERM**

### **1.**

It doesn't matter. That's what he said to him.  
Twelve barrels in a gun.  
Wet weather on a rocky coastline.  
She stared through the mist.  
Nothing had been seen since the ship.  
The gulls encircled, canoodling like the predators they are.  
But that's alright; they talked of the albatross.  
Daylight never dawned.

There were no messages nor tactics of recovery.  
Despairing talk of disaster on a cliff-ringed island.  
Somewhere, a road, gravel, clay.  
Twenty miles to walk, she said.  
The men said nothing else, just watched her.  
The fog was not rain, but mist.  
An alcove of miners' disappearance.  
They would rather shelter than walk with her.

Hammer and anvil explosions break the silence.  
All gulls absent, waves continue, crashing wind.  
A raincoat sinks in the wash. Mire, briny murk.  
He walks, nothing to say now.  
The clay sticks to the soles of the gumboots like the mud at  
Passchendale.  
Fallen neck in an absent shaft.  
She stares, calling the gulls.  
Night has deepened.

2.

She stares, calling the gulls.  
Somewhere, a road, gravel and clay.  
An alcove of miners' disappearance.  
Twenty miles to walk, she said.  
They would rather shelter than walk with her.  
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The men said nothing else, just watched her.  
She stared through the mist.

***D. J. Grierson***

My boat responds  
Ripples of water  
Smell of salt  
Sparkling waves splash  
Harbour looks divine  
Huge cement works  
Smoke billows skyward  
Chimneys Sky Tower  
Nature versus man  
Hands scream blisters  
Tide running away  
Paddle to anchorage  
Drop heavy anchor  
Mudflats spread forever  
Army of crabs  
My toes assaulted  
Swearing in colour  
Stayed out long  
People looking serious  
Manager's car here  
Run to house  
Mother grabs me  
There has been  
Accident, accident, accident  
Father been hurt  
Eyes burnt out  
Ninety per cent  
Body flawed raw  
Burns first degree  
Cruel raw flesh  
Life goes riot  
Hours mean nothing

***Reade Robbins***

The six observers always felt much braver when they attacked as a group, because the outcome was rarely in doubt. This was a sparkling night because the male at the centre of attention was a television news reader, currently fronting an evening show at Newcastle, north of Sydney, but rumoured to be starting soon on Channel 9 in Sydney.

“Well holy hell,” exclaimed one of the group in the shadows, “Look who we have here.”

The group split up, with the youth advancing along the path and the others following at a discreet distance.

One man stopped to talk to the solitary youth, and sprinting along behind, the group attacked, and punched and kicked the man until he was bleeding profusely. They taped his mouth shut with medical tape that went right around his head. Then they took him to the edge of the cliff known as The Gap at the entrance to Sydney Harbour and threw him off. As the body hit the rocks far below it split open, then rolled into the wild boiling surf.

Two days later the police found the battered body floating. The old gum tree observed and knew the pain the man’s mother would feel when the police called at her home.

### ***Reade Robbins***

### **A NORTHLAND MIRAGE**

See the harbour  
My boat celebrates  
Wade to boat  
Put oars in  
Pull up anchor  
Strain on oars

### **AQUA VITO UNO**

Beads of water  
Entangled web  
Sweaty hands  
Baited breath

Jackhammers grumble  
Murmur & mumble  
While white  
tenement houses  
tumble

Bleak down beckons  
Simmering heat in  
boiling weather  
No relief

Silver threads winding  
Stale teeth grinding  
Brown paper & twine  
trying to find  
Somewhere to rest  
your head

Metal trolley pushing  
holding, encradled  
Someone’s life in  
a shopping Kali Kart

### ***Ezykiel Kennedy***

## **TANE MAHUTA 1**

Talking Tiki stands on the open stage  
MC to his ancestors  
a giant among his peers  
the other players gather round  
to listen to the spoken tongue  
Silently presiding, he stares  
into the empty auditorium  
A Brechtian pause, almost Pinter  
in its effect, hierarchy of Mana,  
positioned centre stage  
he speaks not in stilted English or  
Te Maori but sign language  
Aroha absconds with the verbs  
the sharp consonants as his three  
fingered hands begin to move  
Tane Mahuta stands in the  
scenic background and whispers  
to Maui -- "Fish up another  
island, for this one is corrupt  
with foreign investment."  
"Tell that to your Japanese bride,"  
Maui replied.

*Ezykiel Kennedy*

For after the games the boys  
stripped off their shirts  
and exchanged with the  
visiting team.  
Then off to the showers  
steam floated for hours  
till the boys were fit to be seen

Then came the speeches  
Bobby outdid the teacher  
his chest bursting forth from his shirt.  
Then came the carousing and good  
natured jousting  
the Saturday fling by the dirt...

*Reade Robbins*

## **BY THE LIGHT OF THE LAMP**

The oldest Blue Gum Eucalyptus tree along the trails through the park above Bondi Beach had seen many things over one hundred years. There were the people of the day, the people of the night, and the twilight people who lived in and out of the shadows and were attracted to the lights of the public toilet block, where people met people. These meetings were usually anonymous, brief and intense, then broke up like a bird torn apart like a hawk. But all-seeing eyes of white, yellow and red, filled with hate, were watching from the shrubs and the old gum tree itself.

## BOBBY McCAIN

From mountain and plain  
    young Bobby McCain  
Was the stallion, the lion  
    the stud  
The fillies oozed charm  
    while the boys dared no harm  
for the kids all wanted  
    to be  
Bobby's buddy.

For this was the heartland  
    the hills and the plains  
Where the cows munched on grass  
    and slurped water  
But many a mother dreamed  
    schemes in the shade  
Of young Bobby getting hitched  
    to her daughter...

For Bobby was king  
    of the valley's fifteen  
that gallant band  
    of rugby promoters  
Though they lost all their games  
    the local folk came  
To see Bobby wow  
    all their daughters.

## SUMMER SALSA

Percussive rhythms, streaming  
through the tomato patch...  
Vines entwined, beating to  
the summer haze,  
Butterfly wings lifting the tempo.  
Aphrodite's Love apples in bloom.  
Peering between the rows of Aubergine...  
Bruised purple and cherry red,  
small delicate flowers, show  
the promise of the coming months...  
Dancing in the midday sun.  
Heat of the day, the dewy dawn,  
a faded memory.  
Interpreting, circling, swirling  
moving to the beat...2/4 2/4 2/4  
Just to show that I'm alive...

Aphrodite's Love apples in bloom  
Heat of the day, the dewy dawn,  
a faded memory.  
Butterfly wings lifting the tempo.  
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Dancing in the midday sun.  
Aubergine months  
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the summer haze,

Interpreting, circling, swirling  
Peering between the rows of  
small delicate flowers, show  
through the tomato patch...  
moving to the beat...2/4 2/4 2/4

*Ezykiel Kennedy*

## **MUM'S FOLLY**

The 20,000 dollar chair  
Brown, vinyl  
Mum's folly  
She joked about it  
Spending Dad's inheritance  
If I'd done it  
It would have been irresponsible  
Perhaps a sign of madness  
I always saw the madness in Mum  
But had no insight into myself  
20,000 dollars  
On a vibrating chair  
That sounded like an airplane taking off  
Not that anyone ever used it  
Mum's joke  
My nothingness  
As she groans on the couch  
Deep in her depression  
Longing for death  
Scorning even the faith  
That spawned her  
Catholicism gone down the drain  
She imitating me  
Imitating her  
Clutched together in the room  
With the 20,000 dollar chair

*Peter Finlay*

## OBSERVER

Looking in my father's eyes. An Eric Clapton song off the album "Pilgrim". Eric never knew his father but I know mine and I can see him, leaning forward, understanding, the slightly florid cheeks, the speckled hair: black turned to white. The overbearing staff and nurses he had to put up with; living in relative luxury, waiting to die, never mentioning my mother but she was always there.

And I was there, disruptive, abusive, and he knew it. I wish I could look into his eyes one more time and say, "I'm alright Dad." And the bad things I've done, my negative thoughts. I didn't understand that he wasn't all there until my brother told me, he who finds out so much more than me because I am wild and I am above all not interested. He, secure in his marriage, an impartial but caring observer.

*Peter Finlay*

## CONTAINMENT

A locked door prevents me from waltzing into dinner, so I crave it all the more  
Another lock and key traps the garden outside, I stare more longingly  
A card swiped on the wall leads me to the big out there, I flinch  
for where I live is within an impediment  
a series of enclosures not meant to be in the sense, secure, as a cocoon,  
but as a cage for an animal,  
for the wild and untamed, to be led by the function of these  
enclosures to feel the loss of freedom anew  
over and over, as our daily rituals of capture and release, one day soon,  
becomes stunned by the immediate, endless world

*Gillian Taylor*

## COLOURS OF THE WATER SUN

The colours of the water sun  
Sandy shores, beaches roam

Here, when I was young  
Pohutakawas bloom

The old school yard

Walking walking bush track home  
Bees buzzing, cicadas humzing

Run run before bullies catch me  
Out of breath panic attacks

Colours of the water sun

Golden streams, purple beams  
Silver ripples of the sea

Pohutakawa's crimson bloom  
Here, when I was young

*Katharine Turner*

## ALLAN

You were one of the leaders of our year  
A sensible force among us  
When you took a girlfriend  
She was plain  
As plain as you felt yourself to be

Despite your preeminence in the classroom  
Your ambitions were small  
Where I dreamed of being a famous writer  
You were content to take over your father's farm

I was interested in your experiment with the chooks  
You put three chooks in wire cages  
with a good view of the countryside  
To see if they'd be happy living that way

You noted their aggressive and suicidal tendencies  
And abandoned the idea of a chook farm  
I helped you feed the bobby calves  
Not thinking of their fate  
Though you knew it  
I was too young.

*Peter Finlay*

## **MUSIC IS ART**

MUSIC IS  
ART

A POGOSTICK

MAKES ME FEEL CONTENT

RUNNING

HIPHOP BEATS IS A CHALLENGE

DRINK MOUNTAIN DEW

IS THE BEST

COFFEE

IS SPIRITUAL.

*Oliver Crow*

## **DETOX**

Essence of moon  
Always wandering  
Can I capture  
A drop  
For on darkness  
Falling?  
Moon essence  
To guide glide  
This time  
Heavy breathing  
To create  
Wicked circulation  
Circumnavigation  
Mind babbling  
Poetry  
Pen in hand  
Stops it dead  
Short circuit blew &  
The waves so frozen  
  
Mind detox  
Drinking lots of water  
Sentimentality huddles  
With the ghosts in her bed  
Wrapped tight like blankets  
Around her.

*Katharine Turner*

## MY PLACES/SPACES

High on the hill looking west toward Waitakere Ranges  
golden green contrast bare stripped busy rds  
jaywalking, can't wait to get away from people noises cars  
overwhelmed run home  
trees skeletal now, lining Onslow Avenue  
wind gushing  
a weaker sun beams down  
Matariki: Maori New Year,  
the cot we bought together.

I live in a furnished cave away from the searing noise  
I walk into town and feel ill at ease sensing the vibrations  
all paranoid in the library Katherine Mansfield  
Witi Ihimaera Legends of the Fall  
The fluorescent lighting hurts my eyes  
I didn't recognise a neighbour I might need glasses  
or was I just too overwhelmed & distracted  
I run back home down the tree lined rd to safety.

My garden is full abundant & overgrown  
A box where I keep her letters & poems  
a tobacco pouch Port Royal was always her favourite  
I have a smoke of it & honour her memory.  
She could be anywhere, she is everywhere with me  
especially today, today is her birthday  
A Matariki baby is she.

## REMEMBER

He was once a Navy Seal  
Time had flowed by  
Back when cigarettes were twenty cents  
This man was strong  
With pencil in hand he drew a simple setting  
Handed on to me  
Like an inheritance  
It was a scenic picture  
I applied paint and it was progressively a work of art  
Me the painter visited the setting that he drew in Napier  
And it was the same memory but real in the physical  
A Pohutakawa tree with the backdrop of Rangitoto  
Good memory Navy Seal

*Oliver Crow*

## ZEN ENCOUNTER

I enter from the left  
Seven stones balance in sunlight  
One rock sails in sand  
    to a harbour of mountains  
A bell resonates with the last  
    devotee's wish.  
This zen garden is a pure mandala coaxing memories  
In an alcove a blackbird hops  
26 years ago a black shrouded nun lifts my head  
    and empties the bath water.  
A year later I write in gratitude.  
She breaks her vows and marries.  
Why am I here?  
The bell is silent but the rock turns and sails on.

*Madeleine Heron*

I think of those days you and I spent  
at Hoani Waititi Marae...  
How the routines aroha and work  
made us pull together creating a world  
within this world. There are many worlds in worlds  
I live in a village of units. South African  
Chinese, Indian, Pakeha all share this space.

The songs we loved, Nothing Else Matters...  
she would try & master its intricacies on her guitar.  
Sense of place for our people, Celtic & Maori  
The mana of Mangakiekie, its power  
looming grace & overwhelming beauty  
I look up at my sense of place  
I look up at the sky & see the Pleiades  
Matariki has begun  
the old seasonal year is done.

*Katharine Turner*

## THE FALLEN WARRIOR

The group of mourners gather  
As strong men lift the shrouded corpse  
Onto the funereal bier  
The body of the slain warrior rests on piled wood  
A nod from the chief  
A principal mourner steps forward  
Touches flaming torch to wood.

Silence as the fire takes hold  
A mourner gently pushes the craft into the water  
The tribe watch it drift downstream  
'Valhalla!' many voices shout  
The raft disappears around a bend in the river  
Beginning its journey to the sea  
Quietly the mourners leave  
As the music dies away.

Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries'  
Evokes the image of a fallen warrior  
And stirs memories of my father  
At my request it played at his funeral  
After his death I listened to it often  
It helped me cope with my grief  
And my sense of aloneness  
Both my parents were deceased.

The power of music never fails me  
And the memories are only a thought away  
My parents may be gone  
But our shared love of classical music  
Is a thread connecting past, present, and future.

*Liz Higgins*

## TURNING POINT

*Then you are left with an idea of yourself*  
Lurching into oblivion  
Never having lived  
A waterfall of opportunities  
Dissipated. You hide behind expectations  
Become a vice  
Broken, *you have built a mountain of something*  
A wall of credentials  
A monument to wasted time

It took the loss of your son  
To stop, get off the treadmill  
Sit like Eckart Tolle on park benches for two years  
And awaken to your own presence in the world  
Knitting sinews  
Arresting thoughts  
In the wonder of now

*Madeleine Heron*

Italics from John Ashbery's 'The Lacustrine Cities'

## **SPRING TIDE**

An infrequent visitor you rush up the steps  
Wide-eyed and joyful  
“This,” you tell your teacher, “is my favourite place”  
Scrabble and Asterix accompany you  
Although we need no diversion to work our unique alchemy  
Time to reflect and Be  
Tendrils of spring’s gifts  
To each other alone  
Cherry blossom moments  
My son with me  
The wild celebration of my life

The Equinox tide turns  
Thrusts beyond its limits  
Retreats with litmus trace of smile, hug and game  
This primal alliance is as strongly cast  
As the work of moon and sea

*Madeleine Heron*

## **BLUE SHAWL**

Mum’s blue shawl  
drapes over the chair  
I touch it, caress it  
trace the ‘V’ of its shape  
feel the slight roughness  
of the cotton.

Smoky blue, hint of grey  
I pick it up  
hold it to my nose  
inhale deeply  
the scent of its last wearer.

Your voice echoes  
saying what a bargain it was  
telling me how useful it is  
when the old house is chilly.

I drape it over my shoulders  
feel your loving arms embrace me  
tie it in a single knot  
and sit on the chair  
while memories wash over me.

No longer just me  
part of you is in that shawl  
and echoes of others  
women who wore shawls  
through the years  
now gone.

*Liz Higgins*

## **PASSAGE OF TIME**

Time passes slowly in youth:  
Held in a freeze-frame capsule  
Youth's golden days are suspended in amber,  
And simultaneously stretch into eternity.  
Time passes slowly in old age  
But the days are numbered  
One's lifespan is almost complete.  
It's time to go slowly, and linger  
Remembering days long past.  
Memories of life resurface  
Love's flame rekindles, is renewed  
Somewhere in those in-between years  
Time hovers, caught in its own net.

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*Liz Higgins*

## **FOUNDATION**

Ground swept away  
My son gone to live elsewhere  
Heart strings torn  
'Crucified' a friend described me last night  
A life hung in the balance  
Long shards of time empty of my child  
Yet my mind encases him as closely as a silkworm cocoon

Solace slips in;  
A post woman's unexpected greeting this morning  
Yes, the autumn sun is gentle, giving  
A class of writers to join and create  
Meaning gleaned from memory of my worth  
As I light incense and candle

You are my cornerstone  
I come to celebrate your presence in our world  
Gratitude spills from me as rainbow hued  
As a best friend's basket of wools  
Remembering you at the darkest moment  
A breeze comes  
A subtle caress as strong as diamond: Here I am.

*Madeleine Heron*